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STAFF NOTES:

Middle East Africa South Asia

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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USSR-Bangladesh

Soviets Receive Bengalee Envoy

The Bengalee government sent a special envoy to Moscow last week for three days of talks with Soviet officials. The visit seems to have been intended mainly to reassure the Soviets that the new government is sincere about wanting to continue to cooperate with Moscow.

Up to now, at least, the Soviets seem to have been of two minds in assessing the import of recent events in Bangladesh. The Soviet who heads the Pakistan-Bangladesh section at the Oriental Studies Institute recently told a Western official that the coup was the result of a personal vendetta between Mujib and the coup leaders (this was indeed one of the causes of the coup) and that there was no significant external involvement. He was quite relaxed about China's early recognition of the new government, arguing that the coup had probably advanced it only by a matter of months.

The chief of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's South Asian Division took a less sanguine line. He hinted that the majors who had instigated the coup were working for "someone" and wondered aloud why China, after waiting three years, had chosen the present moment to recognize Bangladesh.

The Foreign Ministry official was new to his job and has spent most of his career on Far East, not South Asian, matters. His remarks are, however, more in keeping with Soviet press coverage of the Bangladesh situation since the coup and probably reflect views held by other influential people within the USSR. Moscow has dealt with the new regime as though nothing had changed, but it has kept up a steady drumbeat of propaganda to try to ensure that the new Bengalee government hews closely to Mujib's foreign policies. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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